

1. AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS (LISTING OF CLAIMS):

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings of claims in the application:

1. (Currently Amended) A method for assessing skeletal growth of a subject other than a patient with severe heart disease or renal failure ~~an adult in congestive heart failure~~, comprising measuring NT-CNP in a biological fluid from the subject, and comparing this measured level of NT-CNP against a mean NT-CNP level from a sex- and age-matched control population for which at least a first skeletal growth information is known, wherein a significant deviation in the measured level of NT-CNP in the subject from the mean level of NT-CNP in the control population is indicative of abnormal skeletal growth, and further wherein said measuring step comprises detecting binding between NT-CNP and an antibody that selectively binds NT-CNP.
2. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein the biological fluid is plasma or whole blood.
3. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, where said subject is a pre-adult.
4. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein said subject is a pre-pubescent child or an infant.
5. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 3, wherein said subject is a neonate and the fluid comprises cord blood.
6. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein said subject is undergoing a treatment regimen, which may impact on skeletal growth in said subject.

7. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 1, wherein said subject is exposed to chemicals or other external factors which may impact on skeletal growth in said subject.
8. (Canceled)
9. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1[[8]], wherein said antibody is an antibody fragment that selectively binds NT-CNP.
10. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1[[8]], wherein said antibody is a monoclonal antibody or a monoclonal antibody fragment.
11. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1[[8]], wherein the NT-CNP to which the antibody selectively binds comprises an antigenic peptide selected from the group consisting of proCNP(1-103), proCNP(1-50), proCNP(1-81), and proCNP(51-81).
12. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 11, wherein the NT-CNP comprises proCNP(1-50).
13. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1[[8]], wherein binding of NT-CNP is measured with antibodies or antibody fragments that are immobilized to a solid phase.
14. (Currently Amended) A method for predicting skeletal growth potential of a subject other than a patient with severe heart disease or renal failure ~~an adult in congestive heart failure~~, comprising measuring NT-CNP in a biological fluid from said subject, and comparing this measured level of NT-CNP against a mean NT-CNP level from a control sex- and age-matched population that has attained maximum skeletal growth and predicting from the NT-CNP level in the subject, skeletal growth potential of the subject, wherein said measuring step comprises detecting binding between NT-CNP and an antibody that selectively binds NT-CNP.

15. (Currently Amended) A method for predicting skeletal age of a subject other than a patient with severe heart disease or renal failure~~an adult in congestive heart failure~~, comprising measuring NT-CNP in a biological fluid from said subject and comparing this measured level of NT-CNP against a mean NT-CNP level from a sex and age matched control population of known skeletal ages, and predicting from the NT-CNP level in the subject, the skeletal age of the subject, wherein said measuring step comprises detecting binding between NT-CNP and an antibody that selectively binds NT-CNP.
16. (Currently Amended) A method for diagnosing a skeletal disease or disorder in a subject other than a patient with severe heart disease or renal failure~~an adult in congestive heart failure~~, comprising measuring NT-CNP in a biological fluid from said subject, and comparing this measured level of NT-CNP against a mean NT-CNP level from a sex- and age-matched control population, wherein a significant deviation in the measured level from the mean control level is indicative of a skeletal disease or disorder, wherein said measuring step comprises detecting binding between NT-CNP and an antibody that selectively binds NT-CNP.
17. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, wherein said biological fluid is plasma or whole blood.
18. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, wherein said subject is a pre-adult.
19. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 14, wherein said subject is a pre-pubescent child or an infant.
20. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 16, wherein said subject is a neonate and said biological fluid comprises cord blood.
- 21-22. (Canceled)

23. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14[[21]], wherein said antibody or antibody fragment is a monoclonal antibody or monoclonal antibody fragment.
24. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14[[21]], wherein the NT-CNP to which said antibody or antibody fragment selectively binds comprises an antigenic peptide selected from the group consisting of proCNP(1-103), proCNP(1-50), proCNP(1-81), and proCNP(51-81).
25. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 24, wherein said NT-CNP comprises proCNP(1-50).
26. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 14[[21]], wherein binding of said NT-CNP is measured with an antibody or antibody fragment that is immobilized to a solid phase.
27. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 26, wherein where a significant deviation from the mean control level is found in the fluid, the method comprises a further step of comparing the measured NT-CNP level with one or more mean NT-CNP levels from populations having known skeletal diseases or disorders to make a more accurate diagnosis of a specific disease or disorder.
28. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 16, wherein said skeletal disease or disorder is selected from the group consisting of congenital disorders, delayed developmental disorders and advanced development syndromes.
29. (Currently Amended) A method of monitoring skeletal growth in a subject other than a patient with severe heart disease or renal failure~~an adult in congestive heart failure~~, comprising:
 - (a) measuring a[[the]] level of NT-CNP in a first biological fluid from said

subject and measuring a[[the]] level of NT-CNP in a second biological fluid, wherein said second biological fluid is taken from the same subject as said first biological fluid but at a later date; and

(b) comparing the levels of NT-CNP in said first and said second biological fluids, wherein a significant ~~change~~difference in the levels of NT-CNP in said second biological fluid ~~from~~compared to the level of NT-CNP in said first biological fluid indicates a change in ~~the rate of skeletal growth~~ rate in said subject, wherein said measuring step comprises detecting binding between NT-CNP and an antibody that selectively binds NT-CNP.

30. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 29, wherein said subject is undergoing a treatment regimen that may impact skeletal growth of said subject.
31. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 6 or claim 30, wherein said treatment regimen involves administration of glucocorticoids to said subject.
32. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 31, wherein said subject is undergoing treatment for asthma or other chronic allergic states.
33. (Previously Presented) A kit for assessing skeletal growth, diagnosing a skeletal disease or disorder, or predicting skeletal growth potential or skeletal age in a subject other than an adult in congestive heart failure, said kit comprising:

(a) means for measuring the level of NT-CNP in a biological fluid obtained from said subject, comprising an antibody or an antibody fragment that selectively binds to a NT-CNP molecule selected from the group consisting of proCNP(1-103), proCNP(1-50), proCNP(1-81), and proCNP(51-81), and which can be used to quantitatively measure NT-CNP; and

(b) instructions for assessing or monitoring said skeletal growth, predicting said skeletal growth potential or said skeletal age, or diagnosing said skeletal disease or disorder in said subject from the NT-CNP level measured in said biological fluid.

34. (Canceled)

35. (Previously Presented) The kit of claim 33, wherein said antibody or said antibody fragment is a monoclonal antibody or a fragment thereof.

36. (Previously Presented) An NT-CNP binding agent that selectively binds a proCNP(1-50), a proCNP(1-103), a proCNP(1-50), a proCNP(1-81), or a proCNP(51-81) peptide.

37-43. (Canceled)

44. (Currently Amended) A method for assessing skeletal growth of a pre-adult subject, comprising measuring NT-CNP in a biological fluid from the subject, and comparing this measured level of NT-CNP against a mean NT-CNP level from a sex- and age-matched control population for which at least a first skeletal growth information is known, wherein a significant deviation in the measured level of NT-CNP in the subject from the mean level of NT-CNP in the control population is indicative of abnormal skeletal growth, wherein said measuring step comprises detecting binding between NT-CNP and an antibody that selectively binds NT-CNP.

45. (Canceled)

46. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 44[[45]], wherein said antibody or said antibody binding fragment selectively binds an NT-proCNP peptide.

47. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 46, wherein said NT-proCNP peptide comprises an antigenic peptide selected from the group consisting of proCNP(1-103),

proCNP(1-50), proCNP(1-81), and proCNP(51-81).

48. (Currently Amended) A method for assessing skeletal growth of a subject suspected of having a skeletal disease or disorder, comprising measuring NT-CNP in a biological fluid from the subject, and comparing this measured level of NT-CNP against a mean NT-CNP level from a sex- and age-matched control population for which at least a first skeletal growth information is known, wherein a significant deviation in the measured level of NT-CNP in the subject from the mean level of NT-CNP in the control population is indicative of abnormal skeletal growth in said subject, wherein said measuring step comprises detecting binding between NT-CNP and an antibody that selectively binds NT-CNP.
49. (Canceled)
50. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 48[[49]], wherein said antibody or said antibody binding fragment selectively binds an NT-proCNP peptide.
51. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 50, wherein said NT-proCNP peptide comprises an antigenic peptide selected from the group consisting of proCNP(1-103), proCNP(1-50), proCNP(1-81), and proCNP(51-81).